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PROGRAM Dan Rather Commentary STATION WTOP Radio
CBS Network

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SUBJECT Admiral Inman Resigns

DAN RATHER: Everyone agrees that Bobby Inman was good, maybe the best professional intelligence man in the United States. So it should have been a surprise when his resignation from the CIA was accepted so quickly, so coolly. But it wasn't surprising at all. Bobby Inman was good, but you can make a lot of enemies what way.

What did Inman in, in a moment.

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RATHER: The boys in the KGB must be toasting each other, because Bobby Inman was just the kind of guy they didn't want as number two at the CIA. Inman was a career Navy man, and they often make it big in American intelligence. Usually they're "Damn the torpedoes. Let's have an adventure" types. But not Inman. He was, to begin with, brilliant. In 20 years as an intelligence specialist, he mastered the intricacies of standard, orthodox intelligence-gathering, and then he mastered the technology of intelligence. He was thoughtful, as in full of thought. He had a deep, sharp sense of the place of intelligence, a sharp sense of its inherent limits and its ethical limits. He pondered how to have a first-rate intelligence-gathering operation without endangering civil liberties.

This was -- how to put it? -- not entirely in tune with the foremost concerns of others in the Reagan Administration. And this became quickly apparent.

Inman's boss at the CIA was William Casey, not a professional intelligence man, but a professional politician. Ronald Reagan's former campaign manager, in fact. It was said that a

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clash was inevitable, and it probably was. Inman and Casey had different backgrounds, but they also had different outlooks. Casey supported expanding the CIA's powers to domestic surveillance. Inman didn't.

So, Inman had a problem, and soon he had two. The second was National Security Adviser William Clark. Clark and Ronald Reagan go way back. They're old personal and political friends. It was Reagan who appointed Clark judge to the California bench.

At any rate, the President wanted Clark to work in the White House, and he put him in charge of the National Security Council after Richard Allen left. Clark is said in some circles to be the second most powerful man in the White House these days, and it wasn't good news for Inman when Clark made it clear that he was eager to beef up domestic intelligence operations, eager to include domestic surveillance, if necessary, among its duties. Inman still resisted. But now he had two problems: Casey and Clark.

Soon he had three. The third problem was the persistent story that it may have been Inman who leaked the story of the U.S.-backed counterinsurgency forces being trained on the Nicaraguan border. Their purpose to destabilize the Sandinista government. The story goes that Inman thought it was a bad idea. How to stop it? Reveal it. Put a little sunshine on it. Get people talking. It did, at the White House. Ronald Reagan, the story goes, was told Inman was not a team player.

There were other things. Even admirals don't get rich in the Navy. Inman has a family and college bills, and private industry was calling and ready to reward Inman's expertise with money.

But the fall of Inman is really the fall of a man whose philosophy and convictions had grown unfashionable; the fall of a man whose enemies were less gifted, perhaps, but all too numerous; the fall of an intelligence professional who jostled with political professionals and lost.